



Testament of Hope

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The Work

A Testament of Hope is a compendium of the writings of Martin Luther King, Jr., and of transcripts of some of his better-known interviews, speeches, and sermons, all of which were compiled and published at the request of his widow, Coretta Scott King. The book is divided into subject matter sections and an appendix. The first section, “Religious: Nonviolence,” explores the theological underpinnings of King’s passive resistance philosophy. Because he was connected at an early age with the church, it is not surprising that many of the works in this section focus on the role of Christian love in the struggle for equal rights.

Most of the selections in the second section, “Social: Integration,” are oriented toward the more practical aspects of the Civil Rights movement. Topics include the necessity of passive resistance, the need for eloquent speakers, and the difficulties caused by internal conflicts within the movement.

The third section, “Political: Wedged Between Democracy and Black Nationalism,” addresses the difficulties King encountered while campaigning for immediate change; it was difficult to do so and not to lose the support of moderate and conservative sympathizers. This theme echoes through much of the next section, “Famous Sermons and Public Addresses,” as well. The fourth section contains King’s best-known speeches, including the “I Have a Dream” speech of 1963 and the “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” speech, which was delivered shortly before King’s death in 1968.

The fifth section of *A Testament of Hope* contains some of King’s best-known essays, including the “Letter from the Birmingham Jail” (1963). In this and the title essay, King impugns not only the staunch conservatives who resist social change but also the apathetic moderates who, King charges, perpetuate social injustice.

The sixth section, “Interviews,” contains transcripts of conversations King had with Kenneth B. Clark, *Playboy* magazine, *Meet the Press*, and *Face to Face*. The sixth and final section contains King’s more formal written works, those that were written as, or developed into, books.

James M. Washington, editor of *A Testament of Hope* admits that, as a public figure, King sometimes had help with the invention and composition of the works contained in this volume. This collection is valuable, he asserts, not only as a record of what King actually penned, but also of the principles he espoused and the ideals for which he stood. Because each section is arranged chronologically, it is possible to chart aspects of King’s philosophical development. He changed in response to the changing political and social climate of America. His focus, however—the necessity of nonviolent civil disobedience in order to accomplish the greater good of racial equality—remains evident throughout.

Suggested Readings

Oates, Stephen B. *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Harper & Row, 1982.

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